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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S.-CHINA-TAIWAN RELATIONS

Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies focused news coverage August 21 on the possible Cabinet reshuffle in early September due to the Ma Ying-jeou administration's poor handling of the response to Typhoon Morakot; on the plummeting approval ratings of the Ma administration; and on the on-going rescue and relief efforts in typhoon-stricken southern Taiwan. In terms of editorials and commentaries, an op-ed piece in the pro-independence "Liberty Times" discussed the political implications perceived from the rescue and relief operations provided by the U.S. military. A column in the KMT-leaning "China Times" said it is impractical to associate the U.S. military rescue missions in Taiwan this time with the idea that the United States will come to Taiwan's rescue once the island is invaded. An editorial in the KMT-leaning, China-focused "Want Daily" discussed the "confusing" phenomenon in Taiwan's media and among some Taiwan people, who are ecstatic to see the United States sending military aircraft to Taiwan. The article said that what is important for these people is that "even though [Taiwan's] adopted father, the United States, has severed diplomatic ties [with the island], it remains Taiwan's powerful patron." An editorial in the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" lambasted the Ma administration's incompetence and "lackadaisical attitude to the human suffering caused by Typhoon Morakot." The article said Ma is "preoccupied" with China, not Taiwan, and such a mentality is hurting those people who cast votes in favor of him. End summary.

A) "What [Kind of] Rescue and Relief Effort Does the United States Provide?"

Tainan City Councilor Chiu Li-li opined in the pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 700,000] (8/21):

"The U.S. government has been behaving very actively in joining in the rescue and relief efforts [in Taiwan] in the wake of Typhoon Morakot. Judging the mentality of the U.S. government from the perspective of a Taiwan resident, [we may] roughly arrive at three points of political implications: First, having observed [the KMT government] for a year, the U.S. government does not believe that the Ma Ying-jeou administration is capable of handling the rescue and relief operations properly. [Washington also believes that] if it does not come forth and make the Ma administration feel the pressure to [carry out] the rescue operations, Taiwan's damaged situation will remain unresolved and [will expand] to such an extent that it can hardly be controlled. Based on humanitarian concerns, [the United States] certainly will not be happy to see such a development, and an immediate action to step forward highlights the U.S. image of [supporting] international justice in a timely fashion.

"Second, the fact that the U.S. government was anxious to take action was also because it wanted to prevent Ma, who is tilting toward China, from using the rescue and relief efforts as an opportunity for China to push for unification. This is closely related to the strategic layout in the Asia-Pacific region, and Ma's China-tilting governing mentality has kept the United States on its toes; [such a mentality] is by no means just internal political

criticism from the Green camp only. Third, this year happens to be the thirtieth anniversary of the enactment of the 'Taiwan Relations Act (TRA).' Earlier this year, China's Foreign Ministry had expressed strong displeasure about the efforts by some U.S. congressmen to endorse a joint resolution to mark the thirtieth anniversary of the TRA. Given that the United States has acted very quickly to participate in Taiwan's rescue and relief missions, some people in Taiwan who are keen students of the TRA said the legal basis [that Washington used for] sending out the U.S. military is closely related to the TRA. Should this be the case, it is thus very clear that the mentality of the U.S. government and Congress to insist on the intactness of the TRA has not faded away over time. ..."

B) "Taiwan's Defense Strategy"

Columnist Norman Fu wrote in his column in the KMT-leaning "China Times" [circulation: 120,000] (8/21):

"Recently, Typhoon Morakot has caused unprecedented damage in Taiwan. The U.S. military sending naval vessels and helicopters [to conduct] humanitarian assistance missions [in Taiwan] has caused the public to face the political question -- namely, would the U.S. military come to Taiwan's rescue if the island were under external invasion? ... What deserves [our] attention, however, is a twenty-page report on 'Taiwan's Defense Strategy' published by some pro-Taiwan people on August 3, just a few days prior to Typhoon Morakot.

"The defense strategy worked out in this report for Taiwan can be summed up with four English letters: DDRP -- namely, deter, defend, repel and partner. Judging from the four steps, these friends of Taiwan have put the focus of the strategy to defend Taiwan on the

first three letters. In other words, when it comes to defense, Taiwan mainly has to rely on itself; 'partner' is a last [resort] and thus not reliable. This is because given Beijing's constant military modernization and preparations over the past three decades, the military balance across the Taiwan Strait has long since tipped in favor of China.

"It goes without saying that the word 'partner' refers to the United States. But Beijing has always regarded the United States as its hypothetical enemy in [its plan to] use force against Taiwan. As a result, [China's] military expansion has always used three Ds as its objectives -- namely, to deter, delay and deny the United States from coming to Taiwan's rescue. Given such a situation, the U.S. military forces may not necessarily be able to stop Beijing from invading Taiwan, and even if it intervenes, [the U.S. military] will not necessarily be certain [about its likelihood] to win the war. That is why 'partner' is listed at the end of the 'four keys' for Taiwan's defense strategy. Having understood [such a basic truth], we must no longer hold impractical ideas that Taiwan's security [should] rely on the United States. ..."

C) "The Taiwan Adopted Sons of Uncle Sam"

The China-leaning "Want Daily" [circulation: 10,000] editorialized (8/21):

"... Even though the United States emphasized that this is humanitarian aid, and the materials it has shipped [to Taiwan] are military plastic tarpaulins and several heavy lift helicopters, the move [itself], to everyone's surprise, has satisfied some people's psychological condition, regardless of the fact that no victims have yet to be rescued. Some media [outlets] even used whole-page photos and consecutive news stories to report the news of the U.S. military coming to Taiwan. It appears that the message they [sought to] deliver to the readers and audience [in Taiwan] was that the U.S. military's protective umbrella has been spread open above Taiwan. Media reports have constantly emphasized that this is the first time in many years that U.S. military aircraft have landed in Taiwan, how superior the capabilities of the [U.S.] military aircraft are, and the political implications behind the [U.S.] military presence in Taiwan. The purpose of [these reports] was nothing less than to convey the feeling that [people] are too embarrassed to tell: namely, Taiwan is still under the wings of the United States, and Taiwan people should thus feel secure!

"The reactions of [the Taiwan] media and many [Taiwan] people to the U.S. military coming to Taiwan have been quite confusing. More interestingly, such reactions and feelings were shared by the Blue and Green camps alike. In Taiwan, there are not too many things that one can hardly tell whether it is [supported by] Blue or Green.

For those who were ecstatic when they saw the United States sending military aircraft to Taiwan, it is no longer important to tell Blue from Green. What is important [to them] is that even though [Taiwan's] adopted father, the United States, has severed diplomatic ties [with the island], it remains Taiwan's powerful patron. ..."

D) "Ma Has China in Mind, not Taiwan"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" [circulation: 20,000] editorialized (8/21):

"President Ma Ying-jeou has been roundly condemned for his and the government's lackadaisical attitude to the human suffering caused by Typhoon Morakot. ... Unfortunately, Ma, ever the opportunist, has taken advantage of the public's lowered guard to further his cross-strait agenda, exploiting demands for improvements to government rescue efforts to make subtle yet significant changes to the military's objectives. These changes will in all probability weaken an already demoralized fighting force. Speaking at a press conference on Wednesday, Ma said that disaster prevention and rescue would become the main task of the armed forces and that nature -- not China, with its 1,500 ballistic missiles and growing arsenal of high-tech weaponry -- was now Taiwan's biggest enemy.

"Ma promised to buy 15 fewer Black Hawk helicopters from the US than previously planned and use the savings on new rescue equipment. A disturbing consequence of Morakot, therefore, has been a further reduction in military strength and an even softer attitude toward the only country that threatens Taiwan. China's belligerence has not waned, nor has it retracted its threat to use force against Taiwan. Another issue that has escaped the attention of many in this time of crisis is the government's failure to put together a UN bid this year. ... If Ma wants to win a second term, he needs to stop focusing on China and start focusing on Taiwan. His preoccupation with the 'mainland' is hurting the very people who made him what he is."

WANG